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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 JERUSALEM 000502

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NEA FOR FRONT OFFICE; NSC FOR ABRAMS/DORAN/WATERS

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [KPAL](#) [KWBG](#) [KDEM](#)

SUBJECT: FATAH WEST BANK FIELD COMMITTEE CONTROVERSY

REF: 2006 JERUSALEM 5050

Classified By: Consul General Jake Walles, per reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

**¶1. (C) SUMMARY:** President Mahmud Abbas (Abu Mazen) issued a decree on March 1 creating a 33-member Fatah field committee for the West Bank with Hussayn al-Shaykh as chairman. While Abbas charged the national, West Bank, and Gaza field committees with the general mission of organizing and mobilizing support for Fatah, committee members say the decrees do not specify the committees' mandate, powers, and chain-of-command. Several Fatah leaders have criticized Abu Mazen's creation of the committees and appointment of their members without elections, while some activists accuse Abbas of packing the committees with allies of Fatah PLC member Muhammad Dahlan. The West Bank field committee chairman said Abu Mazen is trying to address the opposition by meeting with committee members and Fatah's main constituencies. A close supporter of jailed Fatah leader Marwan Barghuthi said Barghuthi has reservations about the committees and is guiding preparation of an alternative Fatah reform plan. END SUMMARY.

COMMITTEES TO SUPERSEDE SOME  
FORMER GOVERNING STRUCTURES

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**¶2. (SBU)** President Mahmud Abbas (Abu Mazen) issued a decree on March 1 creating a 33-member West Bank Fatah field committee with Hussayn al-Shaykh as chairman, following creation of a Gaza field committee on December 23 and a national committee on January 16. The decrees disband most existing regional Fatah party structures, including the High Committees and Reference Committee. The new West Bank committee includes all Fatah district Secretaries-General, several well-known West Bank grassroots leaders, and five female Fatah activists. The West Bank and Gaza committees nominally report to the Fatah Supreme Organizational Committee, led by former PLC speaker Rawhi Fatuh, who has the modest title of "coordinator" to avoid conflict with other Fatah powerbrokers on the committee.

COMMITTEE MANDATES UNCLEAR

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**¶3. (C)** The Secretaries of the Gaza and West Bank committees (Majid Abu Shammali and Hussayn al-Shaykh respectively) say Abbas' decrees charge the field committees with organizing and mobilizing support for Fatah, but do not specify the committees' mandate, powers, and chain-of-command. Committee members' protests over composition and Rawhi Fatuh's appointment as "coordinator" of the Supreme Committee deferred discussion of these questions, al-Shaykh said. However, both Abu Shammali and al-Shaykh have told us they report directly to Abu Mazen, not to Fatuh or the Supreme Organizational Committee. Committee members say the three

committees are drafting by-laws to resolve these issues. Al-Shaykh told NEA DAS Scott Carpenter in a March 7 meeting that he hopes his committee's by-laws will be drafted "within a week." (Note: Opposition to the committees makes that an unrealistic goal. End note).

INTERNAL OPPOSITION TO  
COMMITTEE PICKS

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**¶4.** (C) While several high-profile grassroots activists affiliated with Marwan Barghuthi have objected to the composition of the West Bank committee in recent weeks (reported septels), West Bank committee member Hatim Abd al-Qadr and other contacts say that both Abu Mazen and al-Shaykh are determined to proceed with the current committee compositions. Activists criticize appointment of committee members without elections to determine membership, while several Fatah leaders question Abu Mazen's appointment of committee members without formal consultation with the FCC or Fatah Revolutionary Council (FRC).

**¶5.** (C) Al-Shaykh and Abd al-Qadr told DAS Carpenter in meetings on March 6-7 that Abu Mazen called for a meeting of the West Bank committee in Ramallah on March 12 to discuss these concerns. Al-Shaykh said Abu Mazen will use the meeting to demonstrate support for the committee and set its direction. Fatah sources say they expect Abu Mazen to try to convince West Bank grassroots activists that the committees are transitional and will be elected in the future, and that the committees represent the best path toward holding the 6th Fatah General Congress (FGC).

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BARGHUTHI TO PREPARE RIVAL REFORM PATH?

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**¶6.** (C) Supporters of Marwan Barghuthi remain opposed to the field committees. Qadura Faris told DAS Carpenter on March 8 that the field committees' composition proves the high-level Fatah leadership lacks grassroots legitimacy. Barghuthi has refrained from comment on the committees, but a close confidante of his told the ConGen on March 7 that Barghuthi is developing a "roadmap" for Fatah reform, for release after the national unity government (NUG) is finalized, to subtly oppose the committees without directly clashing with Abu Mazen, Muhammad Dahlan and others who support the committees.

**¶7.** (U) DAS Scott Carpenter cleared this telegram.

WALLES